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File Code: 3420 **Date:** July 19, 2006
Route To:

Subject: Forest Health-Funded Projects in Mesa Poleo WUI, Coyote Ranger District

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

On July 11, Dave Conklin of our staff met with Andy Vigil (SFNF westside silviculturist) and Tony Barela (Coyote RD) to examine some recently completed, ongoing, and proposed thinning units in the Mesa Poleo project area. This area is a designated wildland-urban interface (WUI) adjacent to the community of Mesa Poleo, about six miles southwest of Coyote. Here, about 2,000 acres of ponderosa pine forest and several hundred acres of woodlands were selected for thinning to reduce fire hazard, provide small products, and improve overall forest conditions. Implementation has been ongoing the past two years; at the present time, about half of this area is in various stages of completion.

Forest Health Protection funding (bark beetle prevention) is currently being used for treatment of about 600 acres of ponderosa pine forest in the northern part of the project area (see our 3420 letters of October 13, 2004 and October 5, 2005). This includes an FY 2005 area (270 acres) with ongoing treatment under contract, and a FY 2006 area that includes 250 acres of force account thinning and 100 acres to be awarded under small contracts. At this time, the District crew has completed about 150 acres in the FY 2006 area. Treatment of these areas generally includes sale of house-logs (vigas) followed by hand or machine thinning of the smaller trees. Residual basal areas are typically 60 to 80 ft^2/acre. In hand-thinned areas, most of the larger diameter material is being removed by the public for firewood; a "brush-hog" machine is used to treat the remaining slash.

Recently completed Mesa Poleo treatment.

Three units located directly east of Forest Road 103 and south FR 172 were examined as potential sites for an FY 2007 project. Each is nearly pure ponderosa pine, with average basal areas of 120 to 150 ft^2 and estimated site indices of 75. Unit 6, phase 2 (119 acres) is a uniformly dense pole and small sawtimber-size stand with more than 500 trees/acre in most areas; Gambel oak thickets are common in the understory. Unit 2, phase 2 (88 acres) and Unit 3, phase 1 (70 acres) are more heterogeneous, multi-storied stands, with significant components of larger, older trees. Each of these units had been precommercially thinned to 8-10 foot

spacing in the late 1970s; based on stump condition, the last commercial entry may have been in the 1950s.

Following sale of house-logs, these units would most likely be hand-thinned by a District crew. Spacing of leave trees would average about 20 feet, but would vary to favor the best dominants and codominants. Treatment of these stands should clearly improve growth and vigor, reducing susceptibility to bark beetle attack. Our only significant concern about recent Mesa Poleo treatments has been the removal of more sapling-size trees than necessary. Although fuels reduction is an important objective here, groups of young pine regeneration make up a relatively small proportion of the total area and would not unduly influence fire behavior. We recommend closer spacing (perhaps 10') within these groups in order to account for natural attrition and promote better growth form.

We commend the Coyote District for their accomplishments in this community-based effort to maintain and improve forest health. Please contact Dave Conklin, (505) 842-3288, if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
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